

A Negro Community  
works in behalf  
of its families

No.

1

AMERICAN FAMILY SERIES

*Consumer Division  
Office of Price Administration  
Office for Emergency Management  
Washington, D. C.*

## FOREWORD

---

This booklet is the first in a series of American Family stories designed to help build total victory in terms of the homes and the needs of every family, and the resources of every community.

American families are the backbone of the Nation—families in cities, in towns, and in the country; families whose earnings must be managed with penny-wise care in order to meet their minimum needs, and others whose income can easily be made to provide a decent living; families with much education and major skills, and others whose education is limited and whose skills are few; white families, Negro families, families with various nationality backgrounds. All of these families have their own particular problems in making their homes strong units in strong defense, and in carrying the added burdens which the war is placing upon them. For some families these problems are difficult indeed.

In every community there are many resources for helping families to meet these problems. These resources are not fully used and many families need to learn of their existence and how to use them.

In every community there are many people who want to help make their communities strong and thus to do their part in the war program. They often do not know how to help. They feel that the war necessarily requires that they do something big. They need to recognize the small things which they may do that will contribute to their community and its continued existence.

The American Family stories are written to show some of the many very practical ways in which people may strengthen the living standards of families in their own communities by doing things in connection with their own jobs or their own activities which bring together the resources of the community and the families who need to use these resources.

This booklet tells the story of a low-income, city Negro family and its food problems. Other booklets in this series will tell the stories of other families and other problems.

# A Negro Community works in behalf of its families

## ***The Andrews Family Illustrates One of the Major Problems This Community Faces***

Mrs. Andrews' husband made \$10 a week. Mrs. Andrews was the guardian and manager of that \$10. Not that she ever thought of herself in these terms. She simply rented a place for her husband, herself, and their two children—Robert, 11, and Nancy, 8—to live in, bought what clothes they didn't seem to be able to do without, and fed the family with what was left.<sup>1</sup>

About the middle of each week she would make a desperate effort to see if they could make out until Saturday, pay day. But usually she ended by getting an advance from the grocery man on the corner. Of course, food was higher there than at other places.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes a pound of salt pork looked mighty small, but if you needed credit, you had to trade, when you had money, with the people who would help you when you didn't have money. So the weeks came and went. And part of this week's \$10 paid for last week's living, for always she owed the grocery.

Mrs. Andrews vaguely wished she could do better, but she was tired most of the time. Her husband was a good man, cheerful and ambitious. In the years they had been married he had worked hard but never found a job paying more than \$10. There had been bad times when he had made less than that. The children worried her. Robert was often irritable. Nancy was pale and listless. But Mrs. Andrews didn't know any way to do better, so she just went along from week to week and dreamed that some day things would be different. Then they would have steak for dinner and bacon and eggs for breakfast.

Mrs. Andrews was alone with her problems and hopes, unaware that in her community were resources, people and plans, information and activity, that were centered around these very problems and hopes.

<sup>1</sup> The Andrews family is fictional; its situation and problems are real.

<sup>2</sup> The grocery store was a business. The use of credit necessarily involved losses, the cost of which was distributed on the price of all goods.

**Resources Available  
In This Community  
Which the Andrews  
Family Had Not  
Learned to Use**

1. A radio market broadcast gave information on the best and cheapest foods to buy at particular times. The Andrews family had a radio. But Mrs. Andrews listened to the music. She had never heard the market broadcast.

Mr. Andrews brought home his boss' paper every night. Mrs. Andrews read the paper and enjoyed it, but paid no particular attention to the food advertisements. After all, she and her family were poor people and those advertisements, she supposed, were for rich people. She did not think of what she might save by watching for special sales.

Some stores in the community carried graded goods, so that you could tell what you were getting for your money, but Mrs. Andrews never thought about trying to compare quality and prices. She just bought the brands she was used to.

Some of the foods which Mrs. Andrews bought came in packages with their weight plainly marked. But Mrs. Andrews never read the labels to see which package really gave her the most for her money. She just took the largest-looking package.

There were often good sales at the corner grocery store—sacks of oranges, potatoes, onions—but the amount was usually more than she needed at the moment. She and Mrs. Jones, next door, might have bought a sack between them, and divided it, but neither Mrs. Andrews nor Mrs. Jones ever thought of that.

Certain goods were always cheaper, if you bought in large quantities; for example, 5 pounds of rice bought at the same time were cheaper than 5 pounds bought at separate times. Mrs. Andrews was aware of this, but she believed these savings were impossible for her. She had such a little to spend. She did not realize that she could buy 5 pounds of rice one week, and the next week 5 pounds of spaghetti.

So none of the better buying plans found their way into the habit pattern of the Andrews family. They would have meant better meals on the Andrews' table and some small savings each week. Gradually Mrs. Andrews might have worked around to where she could start the week with a larger part of the weekly pay. Planning was an art—and Mrs. Andrews had not learned to plan.

2. A small garden could have been grown in the back yard of the rented house where the Andrews family lived. Greens, lettuce, onions, tomatoes, and other vegetables planted there might have added much to the well-being of this family.
3. Robert's teacher had said that people should have "balanced" meals and had shown the children pamphlets which told how to plan such meals. But Mrs. Andrews imagined these ideas would be very expensive. Of course, she would have liked Nancy and Robert to have the vitamins the teacher talked about, but she was confused as to which vitamins and how many they needed and she

didn't know where she could find a clear and simple explanation that she would understand.

In some schools in the city free school lunches were served, but not in the school which Robert and Nancy attended. A hot lunch might have done a great deal for Robert's irritability and Nancy's pallor and if enough parents had requested it, and the equipment could have been found, free lunches might have been instituted in Robert and Nancy's school. This, too, was something Mrs. Andrews didn't know.

A visit to the school itself would have been profitable, for Robert's teacher would have been glad to tell Mrs. Andrews all about "balance" in diet—but as far as Mrs. Andrews knew schools were for children. It never occurred to her that the teacher might help a parent with her own problems. And she didn't want to embarrass Robert and Nancy by letting the teacher know how little their mother knew.

4. At the height of the season for home-grown vegetables and fruits there were good buys for canning and preserving. A basket of peaches preserved and placed high on the shelf would prove a real treat for Sunday night supper in the winter months. Later, when the tomatoes were plentiful other jars might be filled, but Mrs. Andrews never thought of December needs in July—who knew where you would be in December? Besides, jars were expensive and she didn't know enough about canning to be sure her fruit and tomatoes wouldn't spoil and be wasted.
5. There were in this city a Negro branch of the Young Women's Christian Association, an Urban League, and a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. All of these agencies knew that one of the functions of Government is to serve the people, so they had equipped themselves with pamphlets telling about various Government services, and their members were participating in some of the consumer protection programs. But Mrs. Andrews never went to the YWCA, or the Urban League, or the NAACP.
6. In the State where the Andrews family lived there was a Consumer Representative on the State Defense Council, placed there not only because the officials of the Government thought this a wise plan but also because many civic organizations had asked for such a representative. Among these organizations were: The Parent-Teachers Association, the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, and the Negro Business League. This Consumer Representative would have been interested in the fact that a pound of pork bought at the corner store looked so small. He could have set in motion forces that would have ended in having the scales tested. But Mrs. Andrews didn't know that there was a public official who tested

scales, or that there was a Consumer Representative, or even that she was one of the consumers he represented.

7. The Federal Government had available free pamphlets which would have given Mrs. Andrews many practical suggestions. But Mrs. Andrews did not know that the Government wished to help her with her problems, so she never wrote the penny postal card to state her problem and ask for help. No letters and no material from Washington ever reached her door.

Surrounded by these resources Mrs. Andrews continued on her way as one of a large number of American consumers who now live "below the safety line." She knew of no one who helped people learn how to live in a city, and she herself did not know where to start. It never occurred to her that the welfare of her family was related to her country.

Yet, Mrs. Andrews was definitely patriotic. She still remembered with pride her eldest brother going away to the last war. They had all gathered at the station to see him off. And although she had been quite small, she remembered the feeling they had had as they walked home and listened to her mother talking of how the country needed strong men like Ben. If she had known that her country needed her now, she would have said quickly, "Here I am." But she didn't know there was anything that poor people could do.

***Activities Fostered by  
Individuals and  
Groups in This  
Community Which  
Stirred the Andrews  
Family and Others  
Like Them to Action***

There were, however, citizens in this community who had definite ideas. They had seen the special issue of the *Consumers' Guide* on "Food and National Defense."<sup>1</sup> They had heard various speakers. They had listened to radio broadcasts. They knew that in their community there were many families like the Andrews', who lived inadequately and yet who were not on relief. The question these citizens faced was how to get the Andrews family started toward a better way of living. The answer, they knew, was not simple. They knew that there was not one way, but many. There were, however, a few guiding principles which these individuals and groups used.

1. They decided that the basic problem was to get people interested in using and learning how to use the resources now available in the community.
2. They decided to work on only one problem at a time.
3. They knew the value of correcting or reaffirming their theories of what was good to do by acting on them themselves, so that their teaching came to have authority because it was based on experience.

4. They secured some of the latest literature, among which were:

*Consumer Knowledge Builds Defense* (a selected bibliography)  
Office of Price Administration  
Washington, D. C. (Free)  
*Directory of Governmental Consumer Services and Agencies*  
Office of Price Administration  
Washington, D. C. (Free)  
*Handbook for Consumer Representatives*  
Office of Price Administration  
Washington, D. C. (Free)  
*When You Buy Meat*  
Consumers' Counsel Division  
U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D. C. (Free)  
*Government Grading of Canned Fruits and Vegetables, Questions and Answers*  
Bureau of Agricultural Economics  
U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D. C. (Free)

5. Then each started to do things that grew out of their own work and experience, working with the group nearest at hand and easiest for them as individuals to reach.

*Here are some of the things they did:*

***A Teacher  
Thought of  
Gardens***

This teacher called a meeting of the parents of the children in her room. She told them of how she had come to think of the importance in the war effort of each family's being well and strong, and of her own interest in having a home garden. She called the meeting because she felt that they, too, might be interested and as a group they might profit by the experiences of one another. She gave the parents copies of the pamphlet, *The City Home Garden*, which she had secured free from the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Here preparation of the soil, seeds, planting, and general care of the garden were discussed. The group read the pamphlet together, talked a great deal, went home and did some work, came back and compared notes, returned to their work again, and out of all this there came to be some new home gardens in the city. And some of the folks who weren't at the meeting found their neighbors starting to grow things, caught the idea, and started themselves.

***A Church Leader  
Arranged a  
Listening Party***

A leader of the young people's meeting at the church had recently been married. He and his wife had found the Radio Market News Broadcast helpful; however, when they talked about the broadcast to their friends they discovered that many people did not know of the existence of such a

service. So they organized a "listening party" to which they invited the leading young people in the church and their mothers. Robert happened to be a member of this group. His mother didn't think much of going away from home to listen to a radio, but to please Robert she went. The enthusiasm and interest of the others caught Mrs. Andrews and she too became a regular listener to the broadcast and began to buy according to what was reported to be plentiful in the market that week. Listening to the broadcast started Mrs. Andrews thinking about the ways in which she could save. When she met her neighbor, Mrs. Jones, she thought, "Why couldn't we buy a sack of onions together? They're cheaper that way and a sack is enough for both of us." They did.

***A Women's Club  
Secured the Services  
of a Public Official***

The Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, which had written a letter to the Mayor about the need to include a consumer representative on the local defense council, read with some satisfaction of the appointment of Mrs. Cartwright. They did not know Mrs. Cartwright, but they decided to present to her the result of a study they had made which showed that there were six stores in Negro neighborhoods where the scales needed checking. Mrs. Cartwright, equipped with names and addresses, rechecked the list and found that some of the stores were very poor and the scales old. She called on the city's Weights and Measures Inspector. She found he had never inspected the scales in the Negro section of town. He did not have enough help to cover all the community. But he promised Mrs. Cartwright that he would look into the six stores whose names she gave him. A week later she called the inspector. His report was not yet complete. Mrs. Cartwright suggested her calling to see him the following week. When she did, she took a copy of *Check Your Weights and Measures*, which she had secured from the Office of Price Administration, and explained how the idea of making America strong by making Americans stronger had to be worked at in a thousand concrete ways. Some were big and important new ways—others were small and part and parcel of our regular lives. She told the inspector about the group from the Federation of Women's Clubs that had come to see her. When she left, the inspector saw himself in a new light—a protector. So the inspection of scales in Negro neighborhoods began in earnest. The inspector was not harsh with the storekeepers, but he was firm, and people began to notice that a pound of salt pork looked like a pound of salt pork.

***The Negro  
Businessmen's League  
Sponsored a School  
Lunch Program***

At the National Convention of the Negro Businessmen's League, a report of the work of the Surplus Marketing Administration was included in the annual message of the Housewives' League. Mr. Brown, who was a member of the Businessmen's League, lived in the same community as the Andrews family. He was particularly attracted by what was said of the School Lunch Program. As a boy he had been very poor and had often been very hungry. So he was determined to see that this program was available to every child in his city. He called the Urban League

Secretary, who suggested a meeting of the school principals and the presidents of the Parent-Teachers Association. Mr. Brown called the meeting. The facts were gathered and the program was under way. The school Robert and Nancy attended was the last to get the program because it was so hard to get the required equipment.<sup>1</sup> But the Businessmen's League itself eventually gave the money, for the parents, though interested, had few extra pennies.

**A YWCA Club  
Organized a  
Canning Project**

The Busy Bees, a YWCA industrial club (with a number of married members), decided to try their hand at home canning. Each girl canvassed her block to see if there were other people who wanted to join the project. Fifty people were registered. The Committee of Management, interested in the fact that the young women wished to help other people as well as themselves, came to their aid. One member offered her pressure cooker; another, a trained home economist, volunteered to supervise the project. The House Committee offered to collect empty jars from their friends and donate additional jars and all the rubbers out of their emergency fund. The project proved to be popular. It was written up in the local paper. The President of the Housewives' League read of the project and organized similar projects in three additional sections of the city, using neighborhood churches as centers for their work. So a number of people started the winter with canned tomatoes and applesauce on their shelves.

**A High School  
Teacher Planned an  
Assembly Program**

The home economics teacher in the high school gave a talk at assembly on "Balanced Meals." The response was good, so, encouraged, she proposed for a future program the idea of dramatic skits on the role of vitamins in making America strong. Those skits were popular. Eventually, parents found themselves curious about vitamins, A, B, C, D, and G.

**The Women's Editor  
of the Local Negro  
Newspaper Wrote  
About Enriched Bread**

It was Mrs. Andrews' habit to read the Negro newspaper in its entirety, so, of course, she read the item on enriched bread. At last, she thought, here might be a way to be sure of some of the vitamins the children needed. She was telling Robert about it when he said, "What we need, mamma, is to know more about these things." Mrs. Andrews repeated the remark to Mr. Andrews. Mr. Andrews laughed and said, "The boy's right. I'll ask the secretary of the NAACP. He knows lots of things and besides I see him every now and then."

**The NAACP  
Introduced the  
Andrews Family  
to the Services of the  
Federal Government**

The NAACP secretary suggested that Mr. Andrews write a penny postal card to the Bureau of Home Economics, Department of Agriculture, saying that he and his wife wanted to learn how to secure the right vitamins for their children, Robert, 11, and Nancy, 8. The Department sent some literature and a letter which said that in the community where the

<sup>1</sup> Operation of School Lunch Projects, Work Projects Administration, Federal Works Agency, Washington, D. C.

***The Urban League  
Produced an Exhibit  
Directing People's  
Attention to Labels***

Andrews family lived there was a Mrs. Bundy—a former school teacher—who was a trained Home Economist and who had written to say she would like to be of service in the emergency program. They felt that Mrs. Bundy might work with the Andrews family on a plan for including proper vitamins in their weekly food list. But the Andrews family were shy. Mrs. Bundy lived in a big home. So they read the literature and did the best they could by themselves.

A few months before, the Urban League secretary had started a food-buying club among his friends. The members of this group had a real experience in saving money. They learned about the way the country's food supply is produced, organized, and distributed, and decided it would be a good thing to tell other people some of the things they were learning. So they produced an exhibit which called people's attention to the pertinent subject of labels. They placed the exhibit in the window of the Urban League Office.

Local stores felt a repercussion; people wanted to read before they bought. So things had to be placed on shelves where people could easily read the labels before buying. Several additional stores began to carry graded foods.

***The Citizens'  
Committee Opened  
a Diet Clinic***

Attached to the local hospital was a citizens' committee. Stirred by reports on rejected draftees they decided to open a diet clinic. Copies of *Eat the Right Food*,<sup>1</sup> a simple nutrition leaflet, were secured for free distribution and hundreds of mothers were given opportunity to talk over their food problems with Mrs. Bundy.

Mrs. Bundy helped the people who came to the clinic to plan balanced meals and to be less timid about trying new foods and new ways of cooking. She taught them also about quantity buying, which was possible even if you had very little money and very little storage space.

Each of these activities was small. Each grew out of the immediate job or direct experience of the individual or group who started it. But altogether they meant real help to the Andrews family and many families like them in getting started toward a better way of living. They meant a fuller use of the resources of the community and a strengthening of the community and its homes as units in the victory program.

<sup>1</sup>Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services, Social Security Building, Washington, D. C.

## A WORD ABOUT GOVERNMENT CONSUMER SERVICES

Consumer agencies of the Government in wartime have a responsibility to see that as high a standard of living is maintained as is consistent with military necessities and to secure consumer cooperation in the war effort.

The Consumer Division of the Office of Price Administration is the Federal agency representing the needs and interests of consumers in defense policy-making by defense agencies. In addition, to assist and guide the Nation's families in making day-by-day living adjustments to war conditions, it disseminates information through pamphlets, program materials, exhibits, newspaper and radio services, and maintains a field service. The field representatives of the Consumer Division assist consumer-protection activities in the local communities. They also assist organizations in developing wartime consumer programs adapted to their special groups—labor, farm, Negro, nationality background. In addition, they gather on-the-spot reactions to wartime consumer problems and to Government programs affecting consumers.

State and local Defense Councils, through their consumer committees, can mobilize community resources for consumer protection, and can secure the full participation of all groups of consumers whatever their economic status, location of residence, race, nationality, or affiliation.

Functions of State and local consumer committees are:

1. To see that consumers in all parts of the community receive regularly and quickly information on how to use, buy, save, and share available civilian supplies.
2. To insure the cooperation of local merchants to avoid scare advertising and to give consumers adequate buying information.
3. To help prevent local speculation or profiteering.
4. To support State and local measures that aid consumers in a wartime economy.

OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE TO AVOID  
PAYMENT OF POSTAGE, \$300

16-3871 (5-1)